

Business to business buying behaviour

An analysis and sales strategy for Aalund Customer Dialogue

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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>Aalund is a Nordic market research institute that is interested in finding out more about industrial buying behaviour especially in relation to its new analyses product, Customer Dialogue. This online management tool is developed for companies that are interested in improving their business customer relations and service by measuring business customer satisfaction. Through the results of the analyses a company can discover issues that could be improved and in the end gain even more engaged business customers. How companies buy, who at a company decides what to buy concerning analyses investigating business customer satisfaction, and based on what criteria they buy, are the key questions answered to. Answers to these questions help to form a sales strategy for this particular Aalund product. The researcher personally interviews in-depth four company representatives who could gain valuable information by using Customer Dialogue; hence empirical research is conducted by using qualitative research method. The limitations of this research are that the results are not applicable to other products than Customer Dialogue and the results cannot be generalized. The interviewees are also given the possibility to answer anonymously. The secondary data examined focuses on the industrial buying behaviour and factors affecting business buyers. Kotler, Philip. & Armstrong, Gary. provide valuable insight into these subject areas. It was up to the researcher to find the right people in these potential Aalund customer companies who are responsible for acquiring products like this. This partly answered one of the research questions as it became obvious to the researcher that often the person purchasing analyses like Customer Dialogue in a company is either the person in charge of selling, such as Sales Director, or a person responsible of development, carrying titles such as Business Development Director. The buying criteria vary depending on an individual buyer.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Aalund is a Nordic market research institute working with management data for private and public companies. The company was founded in Denmark in 1990 and is a part of ESOMAR, the European association of market research institutes, and meets the ethical, regulatory requirements for serious interviewing. Aalunds Managing director is Mr. Morten Mau Kai and activities in Finland are managed by Key Account Manager Mr. Ted Wallin. The first ten years of operation Aalund focused on gaining deep understanding of the market and on managerial issues facing its customers while producing high-quality data collection and reports. Company's vision now is to supply the best managerial reports, unmatched by any other product in Scandinavia - solutions that are utilized and remembered. Aalund's user-friendly solutions at reporting stage, for example web-based electronic reports, save customers a lot of precious time. The company has in the past two decades developed solutions to approach market issues facing business to business companies in all branches of industry – these are called Aalund products and are related to for example customer loyalty, customer satisfaction and brand improvement. (Aalund 2012)

A new product that Aalund has developed, Customer Dialogue, is a management tool that investigates business customers' satisfaction towards a certain company, the supplier. Business to Business (B2B) is a type of commerce transaction that typically exists between a manufacturer and wholesaler, or wholesaler and retailer, so in other words business that is conducted between companies. It is crucial for any manufacturer or a wholesaler to know how their customers are doing and how pleased and satisfied they are with the cooperation with the supplier. This is important, since any company aiming to succeed needs engaged and hence loyal customer companies. "Business-to-Business customers engage in relationships with companies they like and which give them competitive advantage – customer satisfaction is not enough". By conducting Aalund Customer Dialogue a company can act on the aspects found in the analyses and improve the customer relations if necessary. Aalund Customer Dialogue can therefore also be described as a stakeholder analysis, the stakeholders being customer companies. Gathering this information internally might be time consuming and therefore expensive as well, so using external consultancy to measure customer companies' satisfaction can be the most

convenient deal for a company. Outsourcing even in general can be a value adding activity for a company, to benefit of other company's core competencies. Here Aalund as a third party can bring external expertise regarding investigating customer satisfaction concerning business customers. By outsourcing a company can also obtain objective data about itself and its employees. Through Aalund Customer Dialogue a company can effectively investigate its customer relations. Customer Dialogue exists to inform management and assist in decision making for example sales directors, who are in contact with the customers and as such in charge of these customer relations. The product aims for Aalund customer to know how its business customers are doing, who for example is in need of help or advice. The product gives individual feedback from each business customer to the supplier company; therefore the contact persons at a customer company do not give feedback anonymously, but with a name, for the supplier to be able to act and improve this relationship in a required way if necessary. This is why Aalund Customer Dialogue can be described as an action oriented management tool, whilst most products in the market are strategically oriented. Aalund Customer Dialogue gives direct comments and suggestions for improvements to the persons responsible of the cooperation at Aalund customer company. Aalund believes that dialogue with a customer company representative is much more valuable than standardized measurement parameters. (Aalund internal material 2012)

Customer Dialogue analyses focuses on human relations and asks questions from the customer companies contact persons about the people they are in contact with at the supplier company. This is because Aalund thinks the personal relations are crucial when it comes to engaged customers. All companies should have not only satisfied customers, but engaged customers. This is why focus is on the people working at Aalund customer company and whether they are making everything they can to have engaged customers. Physical products can always be copied by rivals, but talented and engaged employees give a competitive advantage. "Human relations/customer contact points are increasingly important – engaged employees translates into higher earnings" (Aalund internal material 2012)

Aalund Customer Dialogue can be customized according to company needs, meaning for example rephrasing standard questions asked from the customer companies. The customer company's interviews will be done through an online module electronically. The reporting is to be done through an online program. The results can be displayed

from a single customer up to a collective overview of all interviewed customers. This is why Aalund Customer Dialogue is an excellent tool for international companies, since they can get an overview of for example European market versus South American, or even combine all results into the same overview. In the figure 1 below can be seen simplified relations between the parties.

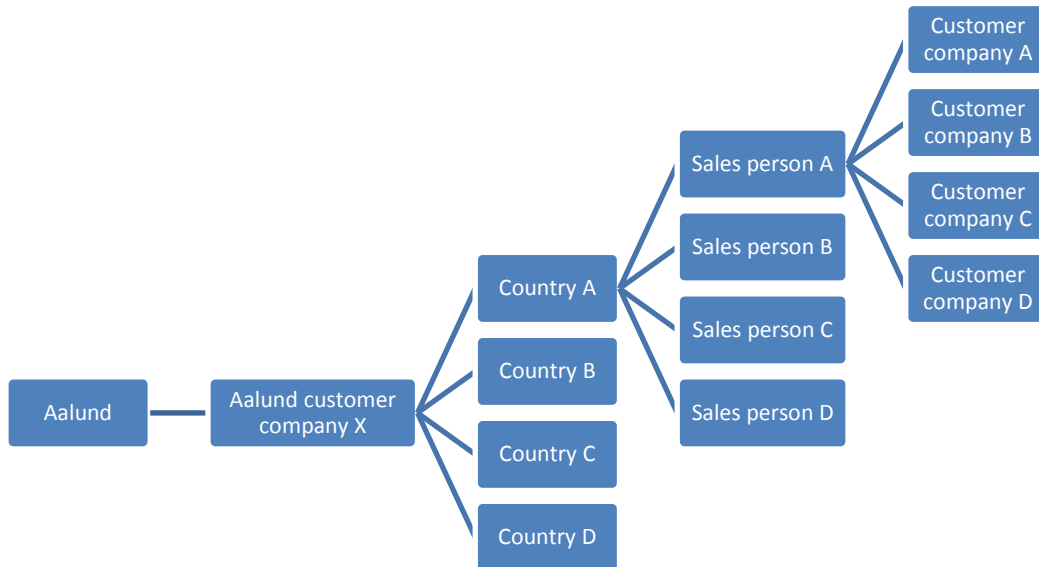


Figure 1. Aalund Customer Dialogue product relations

In the figure 1 can be seen that the Aalund customer company has operations in multiple countries and additionally multiple sales people responsible of his own customers in each country (as an example in the figure country A). These sales people act as contact persons for those companies that are company X's customers. The results are intended to be displayed so, that in the example above sales person A should be able to see the results of his own customers (A, B, C and D). Then country A's sales director could see a collective view of the whole country's results as well as dig deeper if necessary into just one particular sales person's results. Then the Aalund customer company can appoint top management team, who is able to see the collective overview of all customers in all countries. Aalund Customer Dialogue is still developed further and might before launching acquire a new name. (Aalund internal material 2012)

At this moment Aalund is interested in finding out how it should approach target customers in Finland that could benefit of Aalund Customer Dialogue. Aalund also wants to find out what are these target companies buying criteria e.g. based on what criteria

industrial buyers make decisions in regards to analyses investigating customer companies satisfaction to co-operation. This degree thesis's focus is on finding out the answer for Aalund. To investigate the problem and to be able to answer this degree thesis research questions an empirical research is conducted using qualitative research method to gather primary data for analyses. Aalund has appointed four relevant target companies to make in-depth interviews with to gain insight into their buying behaviour concerning products measuring customer companies' satisfaction to co-operation. This degree thesis discusses buying criteria in industrial buying as well as concerning this one specific product, Aalund Customer Dialogue.

1.1 Research aim

This degree thesis aims to gain a deeper understanding of business to business buying behaviour overall and in respect of the product specific, Aalund Customer Dialogue. Based on business to business buying behaviour studied in this degree thesis will be concluded the best possible sales strategy for this Aalund product in Finland.

1.1.1 Research questions

1. How do companies buy?
2. Who at a target company decides what to buy, concerning analyses investigating customer relations and satisfaction, and based on what criteria?
3. How should Aalund sell Customer Dialogue analyses in Finland?

The first research question investigates how companies buy – what are the attributes influencing decision making in industrial buying process. This question is approached through theory in chosen literature and other secondary data presented in part 3 as well as by analyzing the answers gathered as primary data. The second question focuses on the possible actual purchasing situation and the facts affecting the decision making regarding analyses investigating business customer's satisfaction to cooperation with their supplier. This question is mainly analyzed based on the empirical part's findings conducted with qualitative research method through in-depth interviews. Third research question will define the overall sales strategy in Finland for Aalund Customer Dialogue product. This research question will analyze the combined aspects studied in secondary

data as well as the empirical research findings; Analyzing and combining these aspects will result to the overall strategy of Aalund Customer Dialogue sales in Finland. The research process is visualized in the figure below, figure 2.

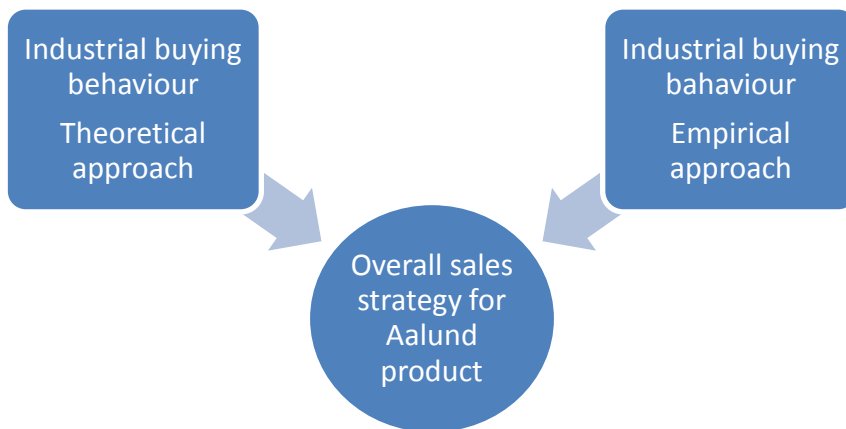


Figure 2. Research process

2 METHODOLOGY

To be able to create sales strategy for Aalund Customer Dialogue empirical research will be applied in this degree thesis. Primary data is crucial to gather to get an overview of the current situation in the market concerning B2B buying behaviour, and especially in relation to the product specific Aalund Customer Dialogue. In this empirical research qualitative method is used in finding out essential attributes concerning buying behaviour in respective companies among specific pre-defined respondents. Four relevant representatives from Aalund target customer companies are to be interviewed in-depth in person by the researcher. Aalund wishes to get an overview of different industries to the sample. These respondents are asked about their organizations buying behaviour concerning products investigating business customer relations and customer satisfaction as well as about the Aalund Customer Dialogue how they perceive the product. Hence the target group is wide, only some industries are less relevant. Less relevant industries or companies would be the ones where there are only a few sales people or just a few business customers. Through a structured questionnaire an open dialogue with the interviewees should give all the necessary information needed to be able to answer the research questions. The interviewees at each target company are to be selected through calling the companies and by asking which person is the relevant contact when talking

about business customer satisfaction surveys. Aalund believes that the relevant interviewees carry titles such as sales director, customer relations director, customer director and business development director.

2.1 Limitations

This research is not applicable to other products than Aalund Customer Dialogue. However based on perceived outcome of the answers of the respondents some conclusions can be made about business buying behaviour also relating to other products. That is not discussed in this research paper.

All respondents are given the possibility to answer the questions anonymously to secure the interviewing process quality. In a case of an anonymous respondent the name and the company the respondent is representing are in this degree thesis marked with characters instead of name. The detailed information of all respondents, including anonymous respondents and the names of the companies they represent, will be given to Aalund use exclusively.

It needs to be taken into consideration when interpreting the results of this research, that all material and knowledge of Aalund Customer Dialogue product is the material at hand at the moment of writing. This is due to the fact that the product is not yet in its final form, but still developed further.

The results of this degree thesis cannot be generalized due to structural limitations in the qualitative research method applied, but are valid among this respective respondent group.

2.2 Qualitative research method

Qualitative research is about understanding phenomena and answering questions. Qualitative research is used to gain insight into for example people's behaviour, motivations and aspirations. In-depth interviews delivering unstructured information are among the many formal approaches that are used in qualitative research. (QSR International 2011)

This degree thesis uses qualitative research method to understand business to business buying behaviour in relation to tools measuring customer satisfaction and more specifically product specific, Aalund Customer Dialogue. Through in-depth interviews an-

swers from respondents are hoped to be obtained, that will give all the necessary information to be able to answer this degree thesis research questions. The interview questions asked, the interview guide, can be seen as a whole in the appendix 1.

2.2.1 In-depth semi-structured interview

Semi-structured interviewing is more flexible than standardized methods. Although the interviewer will have established questions ready to support the conversation, this method allows discussing emerging themes freely. (ESDS Qualidata 2011)

In-depth interviews are excellent in exploring individual's perspectives in given field. In-depth interviews are the best qualitative data collection when open-ended questions are wanted to ask from the respondents. This allows gaining rich information from a relatively small sample. The interviews are discovery-oriented, which allows the interviewer to investigate respondent's perspectives to a given subject. (Guion et al. 2011)

Semi-structured interview will be used in this degree thesis for the researcher to be able to ask follow up questions. All questions asked from the respondents are open ended questions.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Business market

More items, and hence euros, change hands in sales to business buyers than to consumers. According to Kotler et al. business marketers face similar challenges as consumer marketers, most importantly understanding their customers. On the other hand there are also characteristics that differentiate business marketers from consumer markets. The most significant difference is that in business market there are fewer and larger buyers. Due to this smaller customer base and the importance and power of the customers, suppliers are often expected to customize their product to individual business customer needs. Another characteristic that describes business market is, what a study conducted by McGraw-Hill found out, that it requires approximately four sales calls to close an average industrial sale. Kotler et al. state, that a purchase that is made for the first time is the marketer's greatest opportunity and challenge. In this possible new buying situa-

tion the suppliers' brand name recognition is important in establishing trust. To support this type of a new sale and attracting new customers a type of a reference programme can be introduced, in which satisfied existing customers act as references. (Kotler et al. 2009:268 ff.)

3.2 B2B buying process

Inbound Sales Network is based in Toronto and is run by Mr Andrew Hunt who has over ten years' experience at senior level for marketing and sales management. The Inbound Sales and Marketing Blog discusses about how important it is at these times of economic uncertainty to clearly understand the customers' buying process. Many decision makers require even more economic justification for proposals than before. The buying process consists of a set of steps that all decision makers go through when possibly making a purchase. The steps may vary, but typically includes awareness, evaluation and decision. Figure 2 below shows these steps as well as the detailed descriptions of what these contain. (Inbound sales network)



Figure 3. B2B buying process steps. (Inbound sales network)

Buying process can be difficult for the buyer, so the smoother the sales person can make the transitions between the steps the better. In the early stages of the process, during awareness, it is important to show the industry trends about the matter to the decision maker and point out the value of adopting the product. Here the sales person can create problem awareness that could take the decision maker from the first step, *status quo*, seamlessly to the second step, *priority shift*. At the evaluation stages the buyers have some knowledge of possible solutions and want to carry out the process. Buyers are aware of the leading experts in the field and know what they can accomplish. The seller must point out clear differences between it and the key competitors as well as bring forth its expertise in the field. The seller should reason and convince the company representatives, that they should do something different. In the decision stage the buyers

must reach consensus. The seller can highlight customer success stories, how others have gained business value through this particular product. (Inbound sales network)

Kotler & Armstrong mention that business marketers are somewhat expected to participate at all stages of the buying process; help customers to define problems, solve them and stay in touch even afterwards to support the customer (Kotler & Armstrong 2008:162).

3.2.1 Participants in the business buying process

According to Kotler & Armstrong the decision-making unit is called buying center and it consists of all people involved in the decision making and buying process. These people represent different roles which are the actual users of the product or service, decision makers, influencers, gatekeepers and the people who carry out the actual buying. The buying center is not formally identified unit, but instead consists of different people for different purchases. For some purchases the buying center can consist of only one person who then represents all buying centre roles, when for some purchases the buying centre can be many times larger. The users of the product or a service are extremely important in a way, that they usually initiate the buying process. (Kotler & Armstrong 2008:166)

3.3 Business to business buying behaviour

Business buyers have different interests and different decision criteria say Kotler et al. In addition to product characteristics these buyers also have their personal motivations and preferences influenced by for example the persons age, education, job position, personality and culture. Therefore the buying style builds upon many attributes. Some want to keep the buying process simple, some want the marker leader product and some just want things done. It is ultimately the individuals, not companies, making the purchasing decision. These individuals are driven by their own needs while attempting to maximise the rewards offered to them by the company. These rewards include for example advancement, recognition and feelings of achievement. Hence personal needs motivate the buying behaviour. In addition to the product bought to serve personal needs it is also bought to solve company's strategic problem. This is why business to business buying

decisions are both rational and emotional serving the needs of the individual as well as the company. (Kotler et al. 2009:275 f.)

Hutt & Speh write in their book called *Business marketing management* that organizational buyers evaluate potential suppliers based on for example the quality of the product, reliability and company image. Usually when products are commodity-like price becomes the most important selection criteria in purchasing decision, but when the product is unique other criteria dominate and a supplier has the possibility to develop strategic relationship with the customer. B2B customers are in general interested in supplier's total capabilities and how those could assist them in gaining better competitive position. (Hutt & Speh 2010:47)

The appropriate price for a product or a service is not necessarily the lowest, but the one with best price-quality ratio say Brassington & Pettitt in their book *Principles of Marketing*. The buyers also pay attention to quality consistency and suppliers customer service when pondering between different possible suppliers. Supplier reliability and continuity play an important role in business buyer's decision making process. A company needs to know that the supplier will be around in the future as well to secure the value of the procurement. (Brassington & Pettitt 2006:175 f.)

Friendships and social needs also affect business buying behaviour. Trust and respect built on personal level between buyer and seller organizations should be valued Brassington & Pettitt point out. Trust is important to establish, because it is then when the buyer knows that the supplier will act in a way beneficial to both parties. Trust can be built on organizational level, but even studies have shown that personal contacts are an important cause of organizational trust. (Brassington & Pettitt 2006:177)

3.4 Factors influencing business buyer behaviour

For the marketers it is important to know how business buyers respond to different stimuli, says Kotler & Armstrong. In order to be successful in making sales strategies one should understand how organization works internally to be able to turn stimuli into purchase responses. Buying activity itself consists of two parts: the people who influence the decision making and the buying decision process. Both are influenced by internal organizational, interpersonal and individual factors and additionally by external environmental factors. (Kotler & Armstrong 2008:162 f.)

Kotler & Armstrong visualize the factors influencing business buyer behaviour with a figure seen below, figure 4.

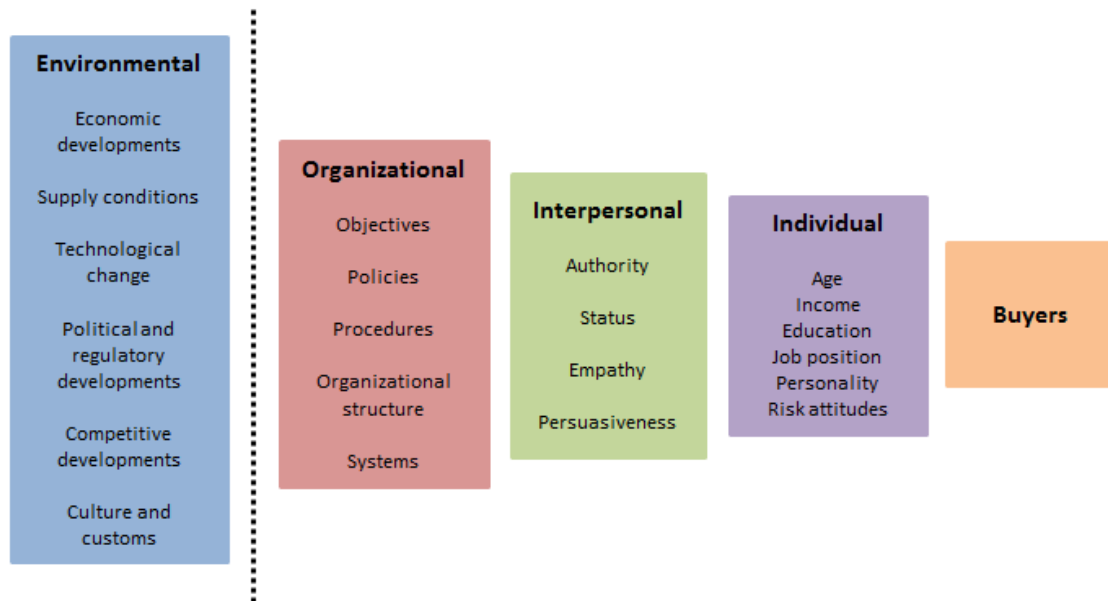


Figure 4. Factors influencing business buyer behaviour. (Kotler & Armstrong 2008:168)

External environmental factors affecting business buyer behaviour, such as expected economic environment and customs regulations, are disregarded in this degree thesis, since research focus is on internal factors in a company, hence that bar is separated from others in figure 4.



Figure 5. Organizational factors influencing business buyer behaviour. (Kotler & Armstrong 2008:168)

Figure 5 above illustrates the major internal organizational factors influencing business buyer behaviour. Kotler & Armstrong say that business marketer needs to understand individual organizations objectives, policies, procedures, structure and systems, since these vary from company to company. Internal organizational factors tells about a specific company that how many people, and who, are involved in decision making and based on what criteria do they buy. A company might also have set certain policies on its buyers. (Kotler & Armstrong 2008:168)

B2B buyer follows the internal procedures set by the employer say Brassington & Pettitt. These guidelines can for example determine that how many quotes are to be examined before making a purchasing decision. A purchasing manual with systems and guidelines might be provided for employees that are involved in dealing with suppliers. (Brassington & Pettitt 2006:157 f.)

Pride and Ferrell list in their book *Foundations of Marketing* the same four factors influencing business buying decision process as Kotler & Armstrong; environmental, organizational, interpersonal and individual. They mention about buying policies that some companies may want unusually long- or short-term contracts. (Pride & Ferrell 2009:167)



Figure 6. Interpersonal factors influencing business buyer behaviour. (Kotler & Armstrong 2008:168)

Major interpersonal factors influencing business buyer behaviour are illustrated in figure 6 above. These factors include authority, status, empathy and persuasiveness. Since usually decisions are made by more than just one person, interpersonal factors are also present in business buying process, when these decision makers influence each other. Interpersonal factors and group dynamics are often subtle and difficult to evaluate.

Some may influence a buying decision because they are well liked, have certain expertise, control rewards or have special relationship with key decision makers. Person with the highest rank of the buying centre is not necessarily the key decision maker. Business marketers should try to design strategies that take interpersonal factors in account if possible. (Kotler & Armstrong 2008:168 f.)

Brassington & Pettitt say that individuals are interested in their status and want to be seen doing better than industry peers or colleagues internally. Need for status can effect purchasing decision in a way that for example decision maker is willing to pay a little more to distinguish from others. (Brassington & Pettitt 2006:176)

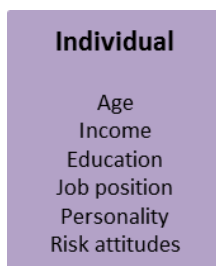


Figure 7. Individual factors influencing business buyer behaviour. (Kotler & Armstrong 2008:168)

Each participant of the buying process has different perceptions and preferences that are affected by personal characteristics listed in figure 7 above. These characteristics include age, income, level of education, job position, personality and risk attitudes. (Kotler & Armstrong 2008:169)

Pride and Ferrell explain how individual factors affect the decision making process with an example in which an older person, who has been in the company for over 20 years might have different influence on the decision making than a 30-year-old who has been in the company for two years. (Pride & Ferrell 2009:167)

The risk attitudes affect decision making, since all individuals have their personal job security in mind mention Brassington & Pettitt. Decision makers ponder whether to go against all others in decision making process or not, since doing that could result in others thinking of this person as trouble-maker and hence this type of situation could even jeopardize future promotions. Also individuals do not want to be associated with bad outcomes of a project, hence often they pick the safe and predictable alternative over

risky one even when it is the risky alternative promising a higher return if succeeding. (Brassington & Pettitt 2006:176)

3.5 Targeting sales efforts

Business marketers need to be efficient and target efforts properly Kotler et al. point out. It is crucial to know who the most important decision participants are, what decisions they influence and what evaluation criteria they use. It is important to reach the key buying influencers, but the larger the seller it is possible to go for multilevel in-depth selling to reach many participants. (Kotler et al. 2009:277 f.)

Inbound Sales and Marketing Blog's article says that the sales people should send out the buying sides' executives' problem-focused messages to gain their interest and after that to show how these problems can be solved by the seller. It should also be easy to buy from the seller. That is why all messages to the prospects should be simplified to avoid irritating information overload that could in the worst case scenario push the buyer away. The seller should just focus on the things that are different from the industry peers products. (Inbound sales network)

4 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The researcher interviewed in-depth in person four respondents concerning their personal and company's buying behaviour in relation to analyses investigating business customer satisfaction and their thoughts about business buying. An overview of different industries in the sample was reached as Aalund had wished. The interview guide as a whole can be seen in the appendix 1. The questions asked during interview base heavily on the theory presented in part 3. This way can be determined how reality, among this respondent group, corresponds with the theory and through that the research questions can be answered to. Each respondent was also asked to state their name, job position and level of education. The interviews were conducted between June 15th 2012 and July 11th 2012.

4.1 Respondent demographics

Researcher interviewed four relevant contacts who are involved in decision making process concerning business customer satisfaction surveys. The respondents interviewed in this degree thesis are Sales Manager Mr. Marko Jyrkiäinen from Arla Ingman Oy Ab, Director of Metos Marine Taina Salonen from Metos Oy Ab, Business Development Director Mr. Kai Dahl from Citec Oy Ab and Sales Manager Mr. A from Company X. The level of education among the respondents varied. Mr Marko Jyrkiäinen has an undergraduate degree in tourism, Taina Salonen holds an MBA, Mr Kai Dahl is an economist and Mr. A is a BBA. The industries the respondents represent are in respective order a company producing dairy products, a company producing professional kitchens, a company providing multi-discipline engineering and information management services as well as a company operating in the banking industry. Due to the varied industries that the respondents represent the results of the empirical research can be seen as representing a large Aalund target customer base.

4.2 Results

4.2.1 Organizational structure and key decision makers in industrial buying process

To start the discussion with each of the respondents it was interesting for the researcher to know who all are involved in decision making process in these Aalund target companies when it comes to analyses investigating business customer satisfaction. Additionally the respondents were asked to name the person/persons that make the actual decisions of which analyses the company acquires. Mr. Marko Jyrkiäinen from Arla Ingman says that the sales director and the sales managers of different business sectors, like horeca and retail, that the analyses would investigate, are all involved in this type of decision making process, but in the end it is the sales director who makes the final decision, or approves the suggestion made by one of the sales managers. He also mentions that when he has presented a need and reasons to acquire something he has never gotten a no for an answer from the sales director. Taina Salonen from Metos says that herself, her superior and the sales managers, all together five persons in this case, would be involved in

decision making. The decision to acquire an analysis like Aalund Customer Dialogue would be made by the director of the unit that the analyses would investigate. Taina Salonen is in charge of Metos Marine unit, so there it would be her making the decision. She though mentions that she would discuss with others as well before making the final decision. Mr. Kai Dahl from Citec says that he is responsible of making the decision of acquiring a product investigating business customer satisfaction in the company, but that he would take it to the board of directors for approval. He points out that additionally they have five business units from which directors might be involved in decision making as well. Mr. A from Company X says that it is him who makes the final decision in the company, but that there is a newly appointed team studying business customer satisfaction, so the offer would be taken to that team before final decisions. It might also be, he continues, that the decision making would go even higher in the organization.

Naturally the discussion with the respondents moved on to the organizational structure of the company and they were asked to tell how they thought that it affects the purchasing decision making in their companies. Mr. Marko Jyrkiäinen from Arla Ingman ends up saying that it is not the organizational structure that would affect the decision making in their company, but it's the financial situation of the year in question, the budget. He points out that researches and analyses are an easy target when it comes to saving money, they can be pushed to the next year if necessary. Taina Salonen from Metos says that the company's different units operate very independently and that is why many good ideas might not be implemented in all units, if some are not even aware of them. Most of the communication between different units happens through personal relationships. Mr. Kai Dahl from Citec says that their organizational structure affects the decision making in a way that he is in the support section of the organization and the business units operate quite independently. "The business unit directors decide upon many things because they are in charge of the business" (Dahl 2012). Mr. A from Company X says that since they have superiors in two different countries it might slow down decision making. To simplify and accelerate decision making processes a new organization model was launched in the beginning of June 2012. He also mentions that they aim to conduct same surveys in all the countries they operate in to be able to compare the results between countries.

4.2.2 Internal organizational policies and procedures in buyers decision making

Next the researcher asked about the companies' policies and procedures that they might follow when making this type of purchasing decisions. Mr. Marko Jyrkiäinen says that before they have not done a similar study as Aalund Customer Dialogue, but have bought ready-made surveys where the whole industry Arla Ingman operates in has been evaluated as well as some specific questions about the company itself. They have gotten a mail introducing the study and they have considered buying separately in each case based on the current need. This means that they have not been involved in customizing the questions to fit their own individual needs. That is why no specific procedures would be made based on previous experiences, but the buying process and purchasing would be done as ad-hoc. He mentions that "Buying in this sales department is not as professional as it is for example in the marketing department at Arla Ingman" (Jyrkiäinen 2012). Taina Salonen says that "We do not have specific policies when it comes to acquiring these types of analyses. These are such specific cases that they are handled individually" (Salonen 2012). Then she continues though that surely everyone is required to look around a little and compare options and prices to see what is available before making decisions. She points out that if Aalund Customer Dialogue would become something that they would do repeatedly then it would be added to practices/procedures. Like Arla Ingman neither Metos has carried out customized business customer satisfaction surveys conducted by an external company. Mr. Kai Dahl explains how Citec used to be two separate companies and only since 1.1.2012 it has been one consolidated group. Mr. Dahl used to before this year work at Citec Information Oy Ab and over there the policy was that the person in charge of customer relation would have made the preliminary decision and then the board of directors would have approved it. He says that "Nowadays Citec Group is more decentralized organization still looking for its best practices and joint policies" (Dahl 2012). This has to do with the facts Mr. Dahl mentioned previously, that also the directors of the business units are now involved in decision making. Mr. A says that since the new organization model was launched such a short while ago internal policies and procedures have not taken form yet.

4.2.3 Buying process participants personal factors and internal relationships affecting decision making

The researcher was interested in knowing whether the respondents think that internal relationships affect their company's purchasing decisions. Mr. Marko Jyrkiäinen says that he feels that it is important to have support from colleagues and others backing up. Taina Salonen thinks that at Metos the internal relationships do not affect purchasing decisions since matters and tasks are handled as they are and not through relationships between people. She continues that "When someone has good reasons for certain procurement it might be acquired based on need and the benefits gained and not based on the person presenting the matter" (Salonen 2012). Mr. Kai Dahl thinks that at Citec internal relationships do affect decision making. He says that it is about what each employee knows, understands and through that value and appreciate. As an example he says that: "We have a lot of engineers here and they tend to value things that they know. It shows in a way that they might downplay things that others do that are important to the business, but they don't know how to do, and therefore lack respect for those things. It has its challenges" (Dahl 2012). He also encourages sales people to talk to people with most power in an organization. The power can also mean that this person can influence his/her own superior Mr. Dahl says. Mr. A thinks that internal relationships at Company X do not affect the purchasing decisions made, since all are aiming to reach the same goals in any case.

The discussion moved on to questions about the participants in the buying process and whether the respondents thought that all the people in the process internally have the same influence to the final purchasing decision regardless of age, level of education and job position as well as if the respondents thought that these three factors affect their own decision making process. Mr. Marko Jyrkiäinen thinks that at Arla Ingman they would acquire a product or a service based on the need, not based on the specific person suggesting the purchase and that everything that is reasoned and boosts the business is implemented regardless of age, level of education and job position of the person suggesting the purchase. About his own age Mr. Jyrkiäinen says that it does not make a difference in his decision making but when one is in a position within organization that requires decision making that of course matters. He also points out that to get to that position in the first place might be affected by the level of education, whether it is enough.

Taina Salonen says that age, level of education and job position as such does not matter in a person, but instead the persons experience and knowledge in the specific area in question matters. She then continues that she believes that her own education does affect her decision making and that she reflects matters through her studies. Mr. Kai Dahl thinks that age or the level of education does not have influence on who has the most power in decision making, but who is responsible of what inside the organization is the factor, since the person with most influence to the final decision is the person in whose area of responsibility the offered product or a service is in. Another factor is that whether it is just one person with the responsibility or if it is a group of people. The sales person should be able to influence all those people who are involved in the decision making process Mr. Dahl points out. About his own education he says that he believes it affects in a way to his decision making that he has a theoretical background and his age affects in a way that the older people get the more experience they have. Then he mentions that “I value practical experience more than theoretical background.” He continues that “With the job position become goals and responsibilities and if what you are offering helps me to reach these goals then yes, the job position does affect my decision making” (Dahl 2012). Mr. A says that it is the person’s practical experience in the field that affects the buying decision the most. About himself he says that since he holds a position where decisions are expected to be made of course job position affects decision making. He also says that with age becomes more practical experience that he respects.

4.2.4 Risk attitudes affecting decision making in industrial buying

Researcher was then interested in the respondents opinions about their own personality and risk attitudes and how they affect their decision making in business buying. Mr. Marko Jyrkiäinen starts by pointing out that “If I would avoid all risks decisions would be extremely difficult to make. In my personal opinion even a bad decision is a decision” (Jyrkiäinen 2012). He continues that in his opinion it would be a waste to spend and invest a lot of time in decision making process and then not make decisions at all in the end as well as that mistakes can be made, but that the consequences must be known. Taina Salonen also thinks that personal characteristics and attitudes toward risk affect her decision making. She says that at Metos they of course try to minimize the risk, but in the end it is about what different people see as a risk and whether they see a risk at

all. Then she mentions about the risks she sees in the Aalund product: “The Aalund Customer Dialogue analyses that you told about, I do not see other risk there than whether the money goes down the drain, or will we get value for our money” (Salonen 2012). Mr. Kai Dahl too says that both the rational and emotional factors affect his decision making. He mentions that trust is built on both, rational and emotional factors. He explains that he has noticed that some sales people at Citec suit some specific customers better than others. Mr. Dahl continues that: “Often I have had to change certain sales people to other customers, since the chemistry have not matched. It has nothing to do with that the sales person would be no good. So the rationality is the base and on top of that the emotional factors are built” (Dahl 2012). He thinks that a successful business should always see possibilities how to improve as well as where possible improvements can be implemented within the organization and that is where the risk factor arises. He points out that: “One must always live with risks, but they should be managed and minimized. We use different calculation models to figure out the probabilities of the risks and if there is a big probability for a certain risk something is done to it. It is possible to live with a small risk and small probability” (Dahl 2012). Mr. Dahl says that of course all industries are different, whether people can die because of risks taken. He continues that Citec operates for example in health care business and there if they make some manual for a machine wrong the worst case scenario is that a patient can die due to it. He also say that if they would make a mistake in planning a power plant correcting it later on might cost them couple of hundred thousand euros. About the Aalund product he says that: “When we think of this Aalund Customer Dialogue I would say that the risk in this one is that the money can be wasted if valuable results are not gotten out of the study” (Dahl 2012). Then he says that his personality affects in a way that since he is a systematic developer and want to improve practices he is interested in these kinds of analyses and measurement tools. Mr. A from Company X says that he tries to minimize personal factors in his decision making to be able to make rational solutions.

4.2.5 Criteria that business buyers base their decisions on

The researcher asked that what criteria do the respondents base their purchasing decisions on and which criteria do they think is the most important. The researcher was also interested in whether the respondents would buy a product that has the best quality even

if it were be more expensive compared to other similar products. Mr. Marko Jyrkiäinen from Arla Ingman says that the most important thing is that the questions they would seek answers for would be answered to. Additionally the price of the product should be transparent, so that one is able to show others what was acquired at what price and what was gotten out of it. He continues that there is a possibility that one might embarrass self by showing others the results and they might think the cost was way too high compared to the outcome. Concerning price he says that he would acquire a product to satisfy their needs and that the price is not a factor in that sense. Value/price ratio is what is focused on in their decision making. Taina Salonen from Metos thinks that it is exactly the value/price ratio that they focus on and there is not just one criterion over others. About the price she says that if the more expensive product has the functionalities wanted it will be acquired. Metos does not always buy the cheapest option she mentions. She also points out that: “It is important that our unique needs are taken into consideration – for example the cultural differences between respondents” (Salonen 2012). Taina Salonen thinks that it is crucial to get a good answering percentage and that the questionnaire cannot be too heavy to use for the customer or for Metos. Mr. Kai Dahl from Citec says that the most important thing is to get valuable information out of the research. The cost must also be considered. The matter of the cost is smaller if the product is sold to us by showing how it could improve our business and sales Mr. Dahl explains. He continues that: “Rationally thinking I would choose an alternative that gives me the best return of investment so gives me the type of information that I can immediately start using and implementing and improve our operations and business through it” Dahl 2012). Mr. A points out that at Company X they always buy the product that helps them in the best possible way to reach the company’s strategic goals. To support this he also mentions that: “We would acquire the product that corresponds with our needs and not the one that is the cheapest option” (Mr. A 2012).

4.2.6 Personal gain affecting industrial buying behaviour

Researcher wanted to examine whether the respondents think that personal gain, like recognition or feelings of achievement, affects their decision making. Everyone except Mr. A say that personal gain does not affect their decision making. Mr. A mentions that good feedback always feels great, but also that he does his job with the companys bene-

fit and interests in mind. Taina Salonen says that in decision making she is thinking of her team and how they could benefit and what they get out of it. Mr. Dahl says that he does not think personal gain in his decision making, but he knows that many people do. He points out that he is a partner at Citec, so personal gain is not in his mind.

4.2.7 Potential suppliers company brand affecting business buyer behaviour

The respondents were asked to evaluate if and how they think that potential supplier's company brand affects their decision making process. Mr. Marko Jyrkiäinen says that absolutely company brand affects his decision making. It makes the decision making easier if the company is known in its field. Taina Salonen says that a good company brand and a company that is known in its field brings a certain amount of trust with it. She continues that due to that a newcomer in the field, a potential supplier, should offer something new and exciting for them to be able to consider that supplier over the others. Mr. Kai Dahl also says that supplier's company brand has to do with the level of confidence to it. Mr. A thinks that the company brand affects in a way that if he knows the brand and it is in his mind when a specific need arises it is then easy for him to contact this company right away. That way this company might have an advantage compared to others.

4.2.8 References affecting business buyers decision making

References were discussed as the final theme. The respondents were asked whether references affect their decision making and what kind of an influence do these references have. Mr. Marko Jyrkiäinen says that when they are considering buying from a company they don't have previous relation with they would need references. Mr. Jyrkiäinen would turn to his colleagues as well as customers for references. He continues that: "We operate in the same field, so their opinion affects a lot. If one would say that don't bother buying from a specific company, I surely wouldn't. If it is not working for them it wouldn't work for us either" (Jyrkiäinen 2012). Taina Salonen also says that references do affect and that if the matter is important she might call an existing customer to ask what they have thought about the product/service. She says that she uses the references

opinions to reinforce her own thoughts. If these thoughts are in contradiction with each other the matter must be examined more thoroughly. She says that in the end one reference is one person's personal opinion and does not necessarily mean that if something did not work for them it wouldn't work for us either. Mr. Kai Dahl also thinks that references affect his decision making and that they are valuable because they are neutral. He might call someone on the reference list and ask how it has been and has the supplier delivered what has been promised. He says about a reference that: "It strengthens the thoughts that I have had about the potential supplier and helps to minimize the risk of co-operating with the company" (Dahl 2012). Mr. A thinks that he might turn internally to colleagues who have had previous experiences with this specific company to strengthen his own thoughts. He also thinks that references create trust and reliability.

5 DISCUSSION

The researcher interviewed four Aalund target company representatives in Finland in-depth in person as well as studied the literature concerning industrial buying. The goal was to be able to understand business buyer behaviour to be able to give Aalund guidelines for selling Aalund Customer Dialogue product in Finland. Several essential attributes affecting business buyer behaviour can be determined based on both, primary data and secondary data gathered by the researcher.

5.1 How companies buy

This chapter answers the degree thesis's first research question *how do companies buy?* The questions appointed to the respondents about their buying behaviour base on the Kotler & Armstrong's factors influencing business buyer behaviour presented in part 3.4.

5.1.1 Organizational factors influencing business buyer behaviour

Kotler & Armstrong point out several organizational factors influencing buyer's decision making process (Figure 5). One of these factors is the organizational structure. Only one of the respondents, Mr. Marko Jyrkiäinen from Arla Ingman, thinks that organi-

zational structure at the company he is employed in does not affect his decision making process. This could be due to the fact that he has always been able to acquire a product/service that he needs without anyone resisting. He has been able to work independently and his own superior, the sales director, seems to trust his decision making skills. Because of smooth decision making process internally at Arla Ingman that Mr. Jyrkiäinen seems to be facing he might have not thought about the organizational structure influencing his decision making somehow. The other respondents on the other hand face different challenges. Several business units in a company slow down a decision making process. These different units might even be in different countries, as Mr. A from Company X points out. The communication between different units would be extremely important due to this.

Other organizational factors include internal policies and procedures according to Kotler & Armstrong. It could be that internal policies and procedures would influence buying process more when the buying situation would be more formal and professional. Among this respondent group none works as a buyer for his/her organization, but in other positions. This suggests that the acquisitions that these respondents make are not usually formalized purchases, but are specified to fill a specific need and are very independent cases. Mr. Marko Jyrkiäinen even points out that purchasing in the sales department is not as professional as in for example the marketing department at Arla Ingman. This shows how different departments inside one organization may have very different approaches to industrial buying. There might be some policies and procedures affecting anyone involved in buying though, which are not written or otherwise formalized, but which many think of as self-evident. For example Taina Salonen's example about that everyone is expected to look around them to compare options for the best possible solution. In a case of repetition, a service/product that would be acquired annually for example, the process could be added to the practices/procedures though. This respondent group does not see any policies and procedures that would tie them in decision making process in any way.

5.1.2 Interpersonal factors influencing business buyer behaviour

Interpersonal factors and group dynamics affect the decision making process, says Kotler & Armstrong (Figure 6). It is interesting, that two of the respondents feel that inter-

nal relationships do not affect at all the decision making process. Taina Salonen and Mr A believe that emotions are pushed aside in business and it is rational people doing the best for their business. This could in fact be a case with some organizations – every organization is different. It would be easy to work with group dynamics like that as a sales person. The theory suggests though that factors such as persuasiveness and status does affect the internal decision making process in an organization. The two other respondents also think this way. Mr. Kai Dahl even suggests that the sales person should go to the person with most power in an organization when trying to connect with potential new customers.

5.1.3 Individual factors influencing business buyer behaviour

The theory studied in this degree thesis suggests that personal characteristics of a buyer affect his/her decision making concerning buying (Figure 7). Age, level of education and job position of the buying process participants was discussed first with the respondents; whether they think all participants have the same influence to the final decision regardless of these factors. Surprisingly they all thought that age and level of education do not affect decision making internally in the organizations they represent. Matters as handled as tasks and not based on specific people working with them. This again shows the rational thinking that these four respondents represent. Taina Salonen, Mr A, as well as Mr. Kai Dahl point out the importance of person's practical experience and knowledge in the specific area in question that would affect the buying process participants greatly. On the other hand Taina Salonen does think that her own education does affect her decision making. Mr. Kai Dahl thinks the same way about his own education that it does affect the way he works and the way he makes decisions. Since the respondents seem to value practical experience they do in a way think that age does matter - to support the researcher's thoughts Mr. Kai Dahl even says that older people have already gained more experience in work life. Job position naturally affects, since due to status and a specific positioning in a company some are by the organization put into a deciding position the respondents think. The researcher also had asked the respondents own education level and job position, but these do not seem to link to the respondents answers in a significant way. Even when all these respondents have different backgrounds education wise, the answers to many questions and the overall attitude towards the companies

they represent and towards business buying are similar. It in fact does seem that the practical work life experience affects industrial buying more than theoretical education. Aalund could therefore assume that the person with the most experience in his/her field is the one given the responsibilities to concerning business development in the area of sales and is the correct contact person.

Risks attitudes of the respondents were studied to gain an understanding how those affect their individual decision making process. As mentioned in part 3.4 individuals do not want to be associated with bad outcomes of a project. Mr. Marko Jyrkiäinen in fact says that he would not want to be embarrassed when showing the results further internally. The respondents say that they live with risks, but that the risks at the companies they represent are managed. Mr. Dahl says for example that it is possible to live with a small risk and small probability. The respondents overall seem to think that in relation to Aalund product the only risk would be that the money would be wasted if nothing is getting out of the results. Different people may see different things as risks and that is where people's personality comes in the picture. The respondents also feel that their personality does affect extensively their decision making, but that they try to focus the thinking to rational aspects. Mr. Dahl has a great example, trust, which he thinks bases also on the gut feeling, emotions. He also explains that these type of development tools suits best people who are interested in improving practices. Due to this Aalund should neither forget the Business Development personnel when cold calling potential Aalund Customer Dialogue customers.

5.2 Criteria that companies base their buying decisions on in regards to analyses investigating business customer satisfaction

This chapter focuses on answering the degree thesis's second research question *who at a target company decides what to buy, concerning analyses investigating customer relations and satisfaction, and based on what criteria?*

5.2.1 Decision-making unit

According to the data gathered by the researcher the decision-making unit consists of multiple persons affecting the purchasing decision. Acquiring a product like Aalund Customer Dialogue, that investigates business customer satisfaction towards the supplier, is a process affected by many people. As the literature (studied in part 3.2.1) suggests it is important to convince the users of the product since they usually initiate the buying process. All the respondents would act as users of Aalund Customer Dialogue, if the companies they represent would acquire the product. Among this respondent group in no case is there only one person influencing the purchasing decision. However the final decision might be made by one person, such as Sales Director, but it seems that the purchasing decision would not be made if some influencers oppose the procurement. This is due to the fact that all of the respondents (even the final decision makers) discuss with others, often both subordinates and superiors, about the possible acquirement of an analyses. Based on the results could be determined that approximately five persons affect this type of buying process. Sales directors are in key role, as well as business development directors, who all are dependent on good financial results, when it comes to cold calling potential customers for Aalund Customer Dialogue.

5.2.2 Criteria business buyers base decisions on

Kotler & Armstrong say that internal organizational factors tell about company's buying criteria, written about in part 3.4. The researcher wanted to deepen understanding of this and discussed buying criteria with the respondents. The quality/price ratio was discussed the most when the respondents were asked to mention the most important criteria in their opinion when thinking of acquiring a product like Aalund Customer Dialogue. It became obvious to the researcher, that these respondents do not only focus on the price of the product, but that it would answer to the needs and questions they have and that the quality of the product would reflect the price of it. The companies unique needs should be taken into consideration – things like their customer base, the answering percentages should be good, results presented in a way that those can be started act upon quickly as well as the analyses should not be too heavy to use according to the respondents. It could be concluded that it is not essential for Aalund to talk about the price, but to focus on the potential target customers' needs instead and try to find out ways of

solving their issues regarding their business customer satisfaction – or more specifically explain how Aalund could help them to investigate these possible issues and through that improve their business.

Also personal gain could sometimes be a factor in business buyers decision making, written about in part 3.3, and the researcher wanted to examine this and whether it is something that Aalund should focus on when selling Customer Dialogue. It seems though that personal gain does not affect this respondent group's decision making process. All respondents say that they focus on the company's interests and try to do what is in line with the overall strategy and helps the company to reach its goals. It is mentioned though, that good feedback always feels great, but overall it does not seem that Aalund should focus on this matter when selling Customer Dialogue. Although Kotler et al. surely are right when they say that recognition and feelings of achievement do affect the buyers decision making, but the only factor how Aalund could influence this seems to be by offering a suitable product for them, that would serve the company's needs and most likely this way it will also serve the individual's needs at the same time. With a product that can help the company to gain business value the buyer will most certainly somehow benefit of it on an individual level, at least if the results of an analyses for example will bring valuable information in for the whole company to be able to utilize.

5.2.3 Suppliers references and company brand affecting business buyers

As Kotler et al. mention in a new buy situation suppliers brand recognition is important establishing trust, written in part 3.1. To support this and attract customers a reference programme can be created. The researcher was interested in knowing whether and how the respondents thought that the suppliers (like Aalund) references and company brand affect their decision making process in industrial buying. All respondents say that a company brand does in fact affect their decision making. Mostly it is due to the fact that a good and known brand in its field brings a certain amount of trust with it. This proves the fact that it is not only the sales person that goes to meet up with the customer who could close the deal, but that in the buyers mind many things are processed throughout the decision making process. Mr. Jyrkiäinen even says that when they are considering of

buying from a company they don't have previous experiences with they would need references.

All these respondents answers gives Aalund good tools into developing an affective sales process from cold calling to meeting up with potential target customers as well as closing deals with them.

5.3 Sales strategy for Aalund Customer Dialogue product in Finland

This chapter answers the degree thesis's third research question, which asked *how should Aalund sell Customer Dialogue analyses in Finland?* The guidelines recommended to be used by Aalund in sales of the Customer Dialogue base on the theory as well as secondary data focusing on the similarities in the results that were found, so that these recommendations would apply to as many potential Customer Dialogue users as possible. The interviews show that there are several similarities between companies in industrial buying as well as several attributes that depend heavily on the company and the individual buyer hence differentiate this way from others. It is difficult to say how one way of selling could be utilized towards all companies.

Aalund should first contact a number of potential customers by cold calling and booking meetings to tell about the product. The person that Aalund should try to get access to for booking a meeting is according to this degree thesis most likely the Sales Director in a company, hence he/she is responsible of the financial results on his/her behalf. It should be though made sure, that it is in fact the Sales Director in charge of business customers. Even in one of the respondents' case it was so, that there were two sales directors, one responsible of business customers and one of consumer market. It is also possible, that Business Development Director is the correct person to address. The researcher though recommends that Aalund starts the dialogue with Sales Director and might then be directed somewhere else if necessary.

When in a meeting the specific company's interests must be taken into consideration. Aalund should focus in its Customer Dialogue selling to the possibilities of the product to be tailored to the customer company needs. In part 3.2 can be seen that the sales person is expected to be around and helping in all stages of the buying process; helping the customer to define the problems as well as solving them and staying in touch after-

wards. This also came up with the respondents that they would appreciate input in the sales stage to defining the problems and showing them how they are able to get valuable information out of their business customers. Aalund is therefore recommended to ask many questions about the company's way of handling business customer relations and through that define possible problems that the analyses could answer to. Important is also to explain how Aalund customer company could improve its business with a help of Customer Dialogue product and more specifically how they could financially benefit of it. What is the return of this investment should be carefully explained to the potential customer. The criteria the respondents use when choosing an analyses investigating business customer satisfaction is the best quality/price ratio. Factors affecting that are excellent answering percentages, easy to use product and valuable results. Aalund should explain the potential customers why the specific questions are selected into the analyses and how they will bring all the necessary information to the Aalund customer. Since many of the respondents would talk to their subordinates about acquiring a product like Customer Dialogue, such as business unit directors, it would be advisable for Aalund to explain in detail how a single business unit director could benefit of the results of the analyses and not only focus on the large overview of the product in top management use. Because the respondents point out, that multiple business units are involved in decision making when it comes to acquiring a product like Aalund Customer Dialogue, it would be recommended that when Aalund is to meet up with a potential customer company as many sales directors/managers as well as business unit directors involved with sales would be asked to attend the meeting to reach multiple influencers at once.

The respondents seem to handle their decision making process as rationally as possible. Accordingly should the sales person act professionally and focus on the financial aspects that the Aalund Customer Dialogue could help them achieve. It became obvious when talking about risk attitudes with the respondents who do not see any extensive risks in acquiring a product like Customer Dialogue, hence as long as the value of the analyses is carefully explained, Aalund does not need to further focus on this matter. It is not either extensively important to focus on the emotional aspects between the sales person and the potential Aalund Customer Dialogue customer in a meeting, although the mutual trust must be created. The trust might also come naturally though professionalism and possible references Aalund is able to give. The researcher recommends that

Aalund introduces some type of a reference programme to be able to appeal potential customers. Since even things like supplier's company brand affect the decision making process Aalund could even further bring forth its knowledge in the field for example on its internet pages. Also by personalizing the internet pages, for example uploading pictures of the account managers in different countries, the potential customers would get and feel closer to the company and bring even more confidence to the Aalund brand.

To support customer's mostly rational decision making process it is strongly recommended that Aalund launches a reference programme in which Aalund customers express their satisfaction with Aalund as well as the product. This way both, the Aalund brand and the Aalund product, would receive praise – this would create trust and confidence towards Aalund. It will make the sales process more effective for Aalund if it intensifies the efforts to bring satisfied customers forth. Aalund should also pay attention to its brand and contemplate whether it could strengthen it to be even more appealing to potential customers.

6 CONCLUSION

In the business market, as well as consumer market, it is important to understand customers. Since naturally in the business market there are fewer buyers, the b2b marketers should be able to customize their products for them to be suitable to different types of companies. A purchase that is made for the first time is the marketer's greatest opportunity where the supplier's brand name recognition and references play a role that should be taken into account when planning an effective product sales strategy. The participants in the business buying process vary from one person to multiple people. According to the respondent group interviewed in this degree thesis the decision of acquiring a new analysis product is never made by just one person, but that multiple people's opinions are taken into account. Since the users of the product usually initiate the buying process they are in an extremely important position for Aalund when cold calling, arranging meetings with potential customers and selling the Customer Dialogue in Finland. Aalund wanted to know who the people are making the decisions of acquiring this type of a product in companies. Even though multiple people usually participate the decision making process, based on the empirical research could be determined that most

often it is the sales director or business development director making the official final decision, whom also are financially responsible of the department's results.

Companies buy in different ways. According to the respondents the buying is not that formalized in their departments, but maybe more in the departments where buying is done more often. It can therefore be said that business buying in the other departments except purchasing and for example marketing is done more in case by case way.

Business buyers have different decision criteria and that was examined in this degree thesis. The respective respondent group did in fact bring forth different types of concerns when thinking of acquiring a new product. Due to differences in potential customers buying behaviour a perfect sales strategy cannot be determined that would apply to every single customer. Despite of this Aalund could follow several suggestions given in part 5.3 when defining the final sales strategy for Customer Dialogue. Based on the answers of the respondents can be determined important issues that should be taken into consideration at Aalund. The decision criteria that was discussed with all the respondent was the quality/price ratio which in most cases affects the most. Business buyers do not only seek for the cheapest option, but want a product that fulfills a need in the best way, and in a way that it is in line with and supports the company's strategic goals. The buying behaviour of the respondents is not formalized and following certain policies and procedures, since this type of buying is very case oriented. Additionally the respondents claim that emotional factors do not play a big role in their buying behaviour, but they try to rationalize all decisions, hence Aalund should in its selling focus on the return of investment that Customer Dialogue could bring to them. According to the primary and secondary data examined and gathered in this degree thesis it is clear that references do affect the business buyers' decision making process. Therefore it is important for a company to establish a reference programme to create trust towards the product and company brand.

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APPENDIX

Interview guide

A short introduction to Aalund Customer Dialogue is shown

Respondent demographics; name, job position and level of education

How company buys

1. Who decides which business customer satisfaction surveys your company acquires?
2. Who are involved in this type of decision making process?
3. How do you believe that your company's organizational structure affects the purchasing decision?
4. Do you have certain policies internally when making purchasing decisions regarding business customer satisfaction surveys?
5. Do you follow certain procedures internally when making purchasing decisions?
6. Do you believe that internal relationships affect purchasing decisions in your company? How?
7. Do all participants in the buying process have the same influence to the final purchasing decision? Regardless of age, sex, level of education and job position?
8. Do you believe that your own age, sex, level of education or job position affects your decision making in business buying? How?
9. Do you believe that your own personality and/or risk attitudes affect your decision making in business buying? How?

Based on what criteria company makes its decisions

10. Based on what criteria do you buy these types of analyses?
11. Which criteria in your opinion is the most important? Why?
12. Would you buy a product that has the best quality, even if it were more expensive than other similar products? Why?
13. Does personal gain affect your purchasing decision (e.g. recognition, feelings of achievement)? How?

14. Do you believe that references affect your purchasing decision? How?
15. Is the company brand important to you when choosing a supplier to conduct a survey for the company you represent? Why?
16. Do you usually ask from others in the industry what do they think of the company you are thinking of buying from? What kind of an influence do these people have in your decision making?